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## **House to vote on auto fuel-economy rules**

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WASHINGTON - A House committee is set to vote today on a Bush administration request for more authority to set auto fuel-economy standards, but critics are calling the measure inadequate.

Congress should impose a fleetwide standard averaging at least 33 miles per gallon by 2015, up from the current level of 27.5 mpg, consumer advocates and some lawmakers say.

Joan Claybrook, president of the public-interest organization Public Citizen, told a Senate Commerce subcommittee Tuesday that she issued the 27.5-mpg standard in 1977, when she was a Transportation Department official. That goal was reached in 1985, but Congress has not raised the standard since. But President Bush is seeking to give National Highway Traffic Safety Administration authority to change the structure of the fuel-economy program, which the White House argues could lead to better mileage.

Under the existing system, the government sets a single average number for all passenger cars made by a particular manufacturer. That prompts automakers to produce small cars to offset larger vehicles with higher gas mileage and emerge with an average fuel economy of at least 27.5 mpg.

Under Bush's proposed system, a car's fuel-economy requirement would be determined by a sliding scale that takes into account vehicle sizes. Both big and small cars would have to become more efficient, but the standard could be less stringent for heavier vehicles.

David Friedman, research director for the Union of Concerned Scientists, said that a size-based system could be an improvement if it were paired with tougher fuel-economy standards.

But key Republican leaders are opposed to any legislation spelling out tougher standards.

"The market can handle this much better than some kind of government regulations," House Majority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio, recently said.